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Integrated marketing communications. Evolution, current status, future developments

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**Integrated Marketing Communications - Current Status,
Future Developments**

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Integrated Marketing Communications
Evolution, Current Status, Future Developments

Introduction

Since the first book on integrated marketing communications (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn 1993), medias and technologies have expanded and accelerated while markets have further fragmented (Kitchen, 2010; Kitchen & Uzunoglu, 2015; Schultz, Patti & Kitchen, 2013). Measuring return on investment has become more straightforward on-line via mobile, yet more complex as many more channels (medias) have proliferated. Consumers are now more streetwise, savvy, and sophisticated. At the same markets have splintered into smaller segments and niches, audiences have become more difficult to reach or access, influence and persuade. Hence, in the marketing communications world a multiplicity of medias communicate messages which often are entirely irrelevant to viewers, listeners and readers creating not only environmental noise but also market nuisance. Despite accelerated communications modalities, it is only a few years since the world experienced a major economic crisis. That alone severely dented consumer confidence, and the aftershocks and aftermaths of that crisis will continue to be felt over many years (Kitchen, 2013). Yet, already in 2016, at least in the UK banking and mortgage sectors the same old pattern of 100% mortgages is already being communicated or promoted for admittedly a smaller proportion of apparently high income consumers (Financial Stability Report, 2015). Thus, the crises of the past will be revisited in the future and insofar as marketing communications is concerned it is once again – business as usual.

Leaving aside environmental turbulence, this special issue seeks to present the latest research from academic participants in the field of marketing and brand communication and measurement concerning **integrated marketing communications (IMC)**. It is likely that the thoughts and views offered in this special issue will help to mold and shape the subject as we move further 2020.

IMC has become one the most influential marketing management frameworks over the last two decades. It is now the overarching theme of every marketing communications text, it is the title for chapters in marketing management texts, and it is the oft repeated theme of professional books and articles presented at practitioner and academic conferences. Moreover, academic journal special issues and editorials have been presented by Journal of Advertising, Journal of Advertising Research, Journal of Marketing Communications, the International Journal of Advertising and in other academic journals and there have been several hundred papers in the marketing and communications practitioner press and calls for papers for special issues continues. Major marketing associations now include courses on IMC as a norm. A great deal of interest in IMC has been manifest by American Productivity and Quality Council (APQC), the American Marketing Association (AMA) and advertising association such as the Institute of Advertising Practitioner (IPA) and their equivalents in other countries. Further, the focus on measuring marketing investments and activities and developing integrated approaches to marketing was one of the Marketing Science Institute priorities from 2014 to 2016. That emphasis continues as from 2016 to 2018 the priority has been adjusted to: ‘delivering integrated, real-time, relevant experiences in context’ (MSI, 2016), a point reinforced in a recent paper by Tafesse & Kitchen, 2015 that ‘the first, and perhaps most important, research priority is measurement’ and supported earlier by Ray Taylor (2010). Undergirding and overarching the academic crescendo is the apparent adoption and usage of IMC by companies and agencies of all types. But, is IMC more about vocalization, volume or does it concern actual usage? How this takes place is among the subjects addressed here.

Challenges

Challenges facing today's marketing and brand managers concerning ongoing distinction and concomitant interface between *traditional* and usually offline sales, marketing and communications and the *new, online interactive* sales,

marketing and communication, and combinations between the old and the new. Brand marketing communication activities are focused upon customers and prospects with the need to measure or show marketplace results.

In the first special issue on IMC published in the Journal of Marketing Communications (1998), Don Schultz and his wife Heidi, spoke of *transitioning* from old to new ways of communicating, based upon the needs associated with the needs of the 21st century. How does a firm or brand move from their current location to where they need to be in the dynamic global marketplace of the 21st century? They argued that the old 4Ps (product, price, promotion, place) approach was essentially outbound, linear, and driven by a supply-side orientation (Schultz and Schultz, 1998). The reality is of course, that markets are not, and perhaps never have been product, production, or even marketing-driven (Kitchen, 2010). Today - perhaps more than ever before, markets are driven by customers, consumers, and prospects. Demand-side factors are just as important as supply-side considerations. And, one day – if technological facilitators permit - *all economies pace businesses will be customer-dominated and customer-driven*. We are not there yet, and may not be for some time, but it seems reasonable to claim that a business that understands its customers and communicate to and with them, with the recognition that business is demand-driven should be able to access and capitalize upon a continuous stream of ongoing information that leads to competitive advantage.

Hence, customer insight and integrated brand communication strategy are likely crucial keys to competing in and winning the marketing game, a game vociferously fought in every country and every market.

So, it would seem on the one hand that the road to integration of messages is complete, as the ideal of one-voice, one-sight, one-sound proclaimed by Don Schultz and his colleagues at Northwestern – and others since then - has become the standard or norm across the world. Thus, what commenced as a single track, in the practitioner world of the late 1980's, with an academic awakening and contributions in the 1990's and 2000's – underpinned by marketplace changes - has become a superhighway for companies, commentators, and academic researchers.

However, though the road toward IMC practice as found in earlier texts and seen as the integration of promotional mix variables (or the the 'one voice' phenomenon) reached its zenith, the journey toward integration from a consumer or corporate perspective has scarcely begun. Thus, what Don Schultz and I (2000) regarded as a four-stage process, for *the majority of companies*, has – to all intents and purposes - stalled at its very beginning. Yes, we have 'message integration' but not necessarily 'consumer integration'. Most companies carry out poor, ineffectual market research. There is an insufficiency of real understanding of markets, marketplaces, or marketspaces. There is a concomitant lack of investment in database and data systems to gather information from customers and consumers on an ongoing basis. Thus, most messages are still outbound and linear, with the added virtue of looking or sounding the same via all media. Integrated brand marketing, where one measures behavioural outcomes in response to marketing communication, remains a far-fetched dream for most companies. IMC, while it has achieved its goal in one direction i.e. message integration, has not reached its subsequent purpose as a strategic business process (Schultz and Kitchen, 2010) in terms of strategic integration or for that matter organizational integration. It is, however, moving in these directions as evidenced in these pages.

Further, there are techniques, processes and workable techniques for after-the-event evaluation of integrated marketing communications. But, as in all searches for a holy grail, almost none work with immediacy, or during campaign implementation. However, a more realistic picture of IMC may be *gradually* emerging from the maelstrom of debate, conceptualisations and currently available empirical evidence. For example, it can be claimed that IMC adoption, irrespective of theory, is both situation-specific *and* context-dependent. Thus, while it is a widely accepted model and paradigm, its use or implementation depends on what the company wishes to do within its own budgetary constraints or what senior managers proscribe, particularly in terms of investment in data analytics, customer interfaces and communication modalities.

There still are difficult and problematic issues. IMC, in terms of its major tenets, design, contribution, and benefits, has gained academic and practitioner acceptance throughout the world. One can already make out the bones of what could be termed a 'central theory', which most IMC researchers and practitioners would accept. Around the edges (i.e. of PR, of turf battles, of a stages theory of IMC etc), there is and will be always be healthy disagreement, conjecture, and criticism. IMC has already proved to be remarkably robust; it is no passing phase or passing fad

(Kitchen, 2004; Kitchen, 2010). However, the time has come for *more evidence* to be presented from companies and for more sophisticated questions to be asked and answered. Only then, will IMC's weak theoretical foundations be strengthened. Current barriers are capable of being understood, corrected, and overcome. And, despite academic quibbling - the crucible of practice, where IMC was born and grown - is where the cutting edge of IMC continues to be manifest and undergoes change.

This special issue offers papers which debate the meaningfulness of, and challenges pertaining to Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) in the 21st century and as readers will observe, papers are provocative, multi-disciplinary and eclectic. All, however, assist in unraveling and understanding IMC.

Unusually, in an introduction, I would like to thank all those who submitted papers. I also thank a veritable regiment of 80 or so great reviewers, all of whom were invited or selected because of their interest in, involvement with, and publications relating to IMC. I have to say, however, we were inundated with papers from all over the world.

In the original call for contributions were sought that would offer innovative insights based on rigorous and thoughtful conceptualization, deep literature review, empirical evidence and/or case studies surrounding, but not necessarily limited to the following research areas:

- How and in what ways is IMC taught around the world? How should it be taught and what should students be expected to learn? How does technological advancement impact a) IMC; and b) how it is taught?
- Evidence of IMC adoption and usage in companies
- Interactions between IMC and ICC (integrated corporate communications)
- IMC and social media
- Evolution of IMC, its current status and relevance
- Connections between IMC, brands and branding in an interconnected and interactive marketplace/space.
- Measurement – how and in what ways are IMC approaches accountable now, and how may these become more
- As IMC was developed in the West, how and in what ways is IMC operationalized in new or emergent markets. Is there any evidence of leapfrogging previous stages of development?

The Harvest of Papers

In the sub headings below, these do not necessarily represent the total contribution or focus of the papers, though a major thrust of a paper may fall into a specific domain. Many of the papers overlap and interfuse between different related topics. However, all add to the topic under consideration – integrated marketing communications.

EDUCATION

The paper by *Kerr & Kelly* addresses the issues of IMC education in the context of digital disruption. It adopts the Delphi technique in recruiting IMC thought leaders and educators from major economic areas in the world. The paper indicates that IMC education is widespread, and that the term 'IMC' or 'integrated marketing communications' has become common parlance, and is here to stay. It is noted that while few object to the term 'IMC', its meaning and implementation varies significantly across geographic areas, countries, and companies. Three major recommendations include the requirement to: a) position IMC as the integrator and digital as the facilitator. This requires, however, leads to the recommendation b) that more data-minded faculty are needed (i.e. faculty with digital and mathematical skills). c) recognizance of a nascent need for an IMC academic association, perhaps serving to help drive the subject forward in a coordinated manner.

The theme of education and learning from an organizational context is also addressed by *Luxton, Reid, & Mavondo* whose paper addresses organizational antecedents influencing the adoption and usage of IMC capabilities. As is

made clear, organizational or managerial learning is dependent upon a firm's marketing and brand orientation. Such orientations may lead to strategic consistency, program implementation and adaptation and eventually superior brand performance. Thus, adopting IMC in one form or another, *without* first addressing these issues would seem to be a recipe for one voice integration, which is the easiest and simplest way to adopt IMC (see for example, Schultz et al, 1993). In addition, Luxton et al add brand size. While for large brands, IMC is now considered to be a critical element of a brand equity strategy, small firms often lack resources and thus their brand building activities may be poorer in terms of investment, or innovative by reason of resource constraint. The findings show that brand orientation (not necessarily market orientation) is a critical antecedent - moreover the brand - however defined is seen as an organizational asset underpinned by ongoing analysis of the needs of served markets i.e. this includes customer and competitor information. Such information is fundamentally necessary to the development and implementation of consistent integrated marketing communication. Thus brand orientation depends on market dynamics, which if understood correctly, lead to integrated communications, which leads to improved overall brand performance. It is interesting that the brand has become the asset, while earlier IMC authors claimed that customers or consumers were the asset (see Schultz & Schultz, 1998). I suspect both brands and customer dynamics are inextricably interrelated, with IMC acting as the intervening variable between. nb, the theme of organizational antecedents is also addressed in a later paper by Foroudi et al (IMC antecedents and the consequences of planned brand identity in HE).

A paper by Finne and Gronroos concerns moving from a focus upon the sender, the organization or source, to a focus upon the customer's integration or sense-making of communications which lays a conceptual foundation for movement toward outside-in oriented customer-integrated marketing communication. Yet, as is made clear in the paper, this movement was prefigured by earlier writers commenting upon an outside-in approach to IMC (see Kitchen & Schultz, 2004; Kitchen, Kim & Schultz, 2010), with Don Schultz the first to argue for this approach (Schultz, 1996), which of necessity corresponds more appropriately with marketing *per se*. The paper argues for a radical re-education of marketing practitioners and academics. The dominant mindset relates more to brands, organisations and marketing personnel. The new mindset refers much more about how to relate to customers and to their ecosystems. The aim is to lead to customer engagement and involvement in terms of communications-in-use. However, this does not necessarily simplify communications, but a greater understanding of customers may lead to efficiency savings, greater relevance, and perhaps even a reduction in the barrage of unwanted and uninteresting bombardment of [marketing] communications to increasingly resistant and annoyed receivers. In other words, to direct attention to customer activity and logic and the ecosystem(s) that influence their behaviour. Naturally, such change means mental models in marketers' needs to change – perhaps the most difficult of all educational challenges.

I would greatly encourage proposals that seek to draw organisations closer to their customers, consumers, target markets and stakeholders. I would welcome the testing of the conceptualisations by Finne and Gronroos, and look forward to the empirical evidence.

A later paper by Mortimer & Laurie also draws attention to the need for IMC education by company and brand managers and also the need for training of agency executives in a national context – in this case the UK.

Organisational and Brand Performance

Luxton et al have already touched upon the topic of brand performance and lucidly described its antecedents including IMC. Ots & Nyilasy, via an ethnographic case study at a leading Swedish retailer, picks up on the oft repeated theme of the need for empirical evidence between what IMC theories may prescribe versus what practitioners actually do in practice. In other words how do practitioners actually behave? What tools or technologies do they use? Which rules or procedures do they follow? What cultural templates, often tacit to users, do they draw upon? And, also, what personal understanding or teleo-affective structures do they draw upon? The outcomes show - as might be anticipated to some degree, that planning by analysts, brand managers and campaign planners comes first, which is underpinned by market and brand data. Developed plans are then approved within their selected retail organisation. This leads to positioning attributes which are then presented, discussed, and tested by a range of customers and stakeholders. This is followed by material set-ups that serve as

enablers and barriers to integration. At no point in the process does IMC-strategizing begin with a blank canvas. In fact, if we commence with consumer data-driven understanding the canvas perse will never be blank. Data driven understanding in this case example, is followed by the other elements of the model described in the plan (see five questions above) and operationalized during a two year process.

The conclusions make clear that a complete and useful theory of IMC needs to contain theoretical understanding of what happens in terms of its practical use. The ‘lived experience’ of IMC needs to be incorporated into the literature. This has been argued for for many years. I agree with the authors that it is imperative that the world of theory and the world of practice needs to be brought into juxtaposition. For, as is also made plain in this paper, there is no shortcut to drawing upon organizational experience or practice of IMC planning and implementation. Nostrums or prescriptions taken from the literature are insufficient.

The challenge of implementation is also taken up by *Mortimer & Laurie* and follows from a series of studies of IMC practice relative to UK organisations. The paper adopts a critical realism approach. Despite many studies in the UK previously, the paper (in my view, disappointingly) finds that UK clients (i.e. the ‘driving force’ behind IMC implementation) are facing barriers to those facing other countries a decade or so ago. Summarised these include:

- Difficulty in understanding IMC
- The risks of change
- Marketing departments lacking control or influence over other parts of the organization, frequently marketing may not be or is not represented at board level
- Agencies may not have a clear role of IMC

The third point seems to be excusable as agencies always act in accordance with client instructions. The first three bullet points seem to relate to the relative poor status of marketing in the UK, amid a general unwillingness to invest in new ideas, processes, and technologies – which sum to a marked tendency of organisations or their managers to draw closer to customers, or put another way, to allow customers any real access to influence marketing processes.

The earlier point of the need for education is reinforced here. However, context – in this case – national expectations, norms and behaviours seem to result in barriers to continuing innovation, including the adoption and usage of IMC. But, if the world of business continues to move in the direction of greater customer involvement in marketing, then this does not spell a bright future for hidebound UK companies.

Brand Identity

The theme of IMC antecedents and planned brand identity is analysed by *Foroudi et al* relative to two London based universities. Admittedly, as universities are drawn further into marketization, the need to communicate brand positioning and benefits to different audiences is mandated. The paper shows that among the driving forces for IMC, identity and strategy must also be taken into consideration. Support is given for the oft-repeated assertion that consumer attitudes may be enhanced by following a strategy and consistently integrating messages across *controlled communication*. In addition, the relationship between brand strategy and *uncontrolled communication* has not yet been proved, albeit in this particular context. Understanding of these extraneous communications needs to be enhanced. In either form of communication, relationships between brand and consumer needs to be understood and enhanced. The outcome is that IMC programmes based on identifiable parameters should underpin brand loyalty.

I would like to see further empirical studies of what HE marketing communication professionals do in IMC terms either from a marketing or corporate communication perspective. Studies are few and far between and the burgeoning growth of higher education in the UK and its evident success with UK and overseas students make this a rich and fertile field for IMC studies in the future,

Networked brand identity and multi-stakeholder perspective in a retailer context is the focus of a conceptual paper by *Orazi et al*. Both this paper and the previous one, extend IMC more into the boundaries of corporate

communication, an area which fits more coherently with the notion of integration *per se*. Admittedly, there are crossovers and interconnections with marketing and the need to differentiate between the two communication typologies is mandated. Neither controls the other, and while it would seem that marketing communications generates by far the lions' share of budget, the corporate communications domain is becoming more important as corporate brands also need to be communicated, perhaps more to stakeholders.

However, to return to Orazi et al - the entire network of a firm's stakeholders are now – or have the capacity to be – involved in the creation and communication of brand identity. New digital media and technologies amend, adjust or alter traditional albeit integrated processes of communicating brand identity, with significant communications now occurring with stakeholders external to a firm. Thus, traditional and more modern contact points must be navigated effectively in today's marketplaces/spaces in developing, maintaining and building brand equity. This likely means, as recommended by the authors, that a host of activities (i.e. contact points) that define consumer and stakeholder brand perceptions may not always be instigated and managed by the IMC function. However, IMC specialists could readily be seconded into other managerial functions such as human resources or corporate communications to orchestrate brand activities in aligning brand identity and image and subsequently brand equity. The need is manifest though, to undertake empirical research and to test the robust hypotheses developed here.

A second paper by Foroudi et al concerns corporate and brand identity and the need to integrate this into strategy and controlled and uncontrolled communications to inculcate trust, loyalty and commitment via integrated marketing communications. However, one weakness is to differentiate between corporate brands and marketing brands depending upon brand architecture. In some companies, the corporate brand and the brand marketing are one and the same. In other corporations, corporate brand communications may be minimal in terms of expenditure when compared to expenditures on individually known and well-loved brands. There the structure of corporate, SBU, product category and individual brand communication may need to be considered. As was said earlier, IMC may well be and likely is both situation-specific and context-dependent. Put another way, a generalized approach to IMC must include industry, company, brand, context, and competitive circumstance. In each case (following analysis of brand architecture and market dynamics, the question of whether the company's identity, strategy and personality do communicate an authentic message to a target audience. Further the audience can be customers, consumers, or stakeholders and the source and directionality of the communications needs to be clearly identified. As was indicated in a previous paper, in a world of increasing access to social media, both controlled and uncontrolled communications need to be assessed in terms of their impact upon brand identity and equity.

A paper by Porcu et al, while focused mainly upon measurement, upon firm-wide IMC, looking at the subject from an organizational perspective and clarifies issues regarding the name and acronym, definition, and dimensions of the concept. Similar to the paper by Foroudi et al, it extends IMC from its initial location in marketing communications or promotion, and moves into the organizational marketing and corporate communication. Thus stakeholders, constituencies and publics also need to be considered and measurement forms developed.

New Media & Changing Environmental Circumstances

While IMC is admittedly accepted as a sophisticated and efficient communications discipline, the marketing communication environment continues to present challenges, and always will. IMC does seem to offer, however, the flexibility to adjust and change as needed relative to *changed circumstance*. Turner's paper addresses how IMC can be utilized in the case of a major event sport sponsorship – the Asian Cup 2015 and particularly how business and community leaders assisted in facilitating event communication in a multilingual region i.e. across 16 countries. In a sense, this can be likened to a multinational or global company integrating a major sponsorship across many countries. In this case, the ambassadors assisted in writing and placement of advertising across the countries. Further, business, media groups, religious groups and community bodies presented an additional range of nuanced subtleties which required nuanced address. Further, local and national communication via many communication medias and modalities had to be linked back or connected to the overall communication campaign. The role of the ambassadors became crucial especially as they had to interact with, and respond to, various stakeholder groups. Traditional media (advertising, WOM, direct marketing and personal selling) were all used. However, new media and social media relative to different stakeholders was also needed (i.e. using their own language and incorporating

associated cultural idiosyncracies). Turner states that - in effect, the ambassadors became quasi internal stakeholders.

In the *Close, Hempel, and Kang* paper, touchpoints are again addressed, and IMC or here IBP (integrated brand promotion) requires every touch point of value to be accessed and used. In conjunction with other papers, the authors see a future where a brand focus is required with demonstrable synergies in digital and multi-modal communication. In this paper, the authors develop the notion that emails with embedded video content are more effective than emails alone. Such connected medias serve to attract attention and evokes emotional responses to messages. But, do such embedded content materials generate more product interest, enhance brand prestige , underpin behavioural intention to the brand, and inculcate to pass along content in digital or social media settings i.e. eWom)? Admittedly, video has been examined in other online contexts such as social media – YouTube and Instagram. In these cases, video is not necessarily within another marketing communication message modality i.e. email. Results from Apple and Audi opt-ins indicate that video addition to email creates more information than email alone, generates greater interest, enhances brand prestige, and results in higher intent to pass along content via positive eWom. Admittedly, the research focus on high involvement products is a limitation to this subject. It would be most interesting to see how this may work in a low involvement product category as well.

Maja Seric also notes the expansion of IMC from its one-voice phenomenon to its more needful strategic, consumer-centred approach. However, progression depends upon technological developments and the need to move from theory to operational practice. Thus advances in social and communication technology or ‘post Web 2.0 marketing, or the social web are among important current drivers and may relate to the development of brand equity. Thus, while some of her hypotheses are traditional – i.e. IMC’s impact on brand equity, this may in turn be dependent on national culture (shown in another way in the paper by Mortimer and Laurie), and in turn impact in statistically significant ways in hotel guests evaluations of IMC, social web, and brand equity. In this case, the sample frame of hotels was located in Croatia with guests deriving from Italy, England, Croatia, USA, Germany, Austria and Spain. Thus, a cross-cultural study, with ramifications for IMC in a developing country or market. Strong positive and significant relationships were found between social web and IMC, and IMC and brand equity. Further, national culture exerted a statistically significant affect in terms of country of origin of hotel guests. Based on the study – admittedly in one service domain – consumers are becoming more active and proactive. Therefore, feedback is required from marketers to online reviews in order to enhance customer experiences. Moreover, dealing positively and expeditiously with online complaints can serve to enhance brand equity. The social web (a non traditional and interactive communications modality) is now considered to be a driver of IMC, and IMC itself acts as mediating construct relative to brand equity.

A conceptual paper by Schnebelen and Bruhn is also located in the new media domain in relation to new ways of thinking which could lead to or underpin strategic components of customer-centric IMC, and relates to educational matters and ties into the work of Finne and Gronroos. Social media emergence adds a new dynamic to previously one-way communication. They cite Berthon et al (2012) that the focus shifts from:

“companies to consumers, individuals to communities, nodes to networks, publishing to participation , and intrusion to invitation”.

The authors acknowledge (as does this editor) that IMC is much more complex than it appears to be at first sight, and as company and market factors change and interactive technologies accelerate, the need for customer-centric communication becomes paramount, or put another way customers and consumers are integral to the brand concept, and communication and marketing processes in order to sustain or build brand equity. Indeed, as we move further into a social media world, integrated marketing communications from a consumer perspective is mandated. As noted by the authors, IMC is by no means a static, once and for all, concept. From its inauguration in the 1990’s its ability to flex, change and adapt to market circumstances has been among its strengths. Now, in the challenge of social media, IMC will be noted by a balancing act between a company’s branding activities and the concomitant integration of consumer centred issues.

I would like to see empirical evidence to support many of the issues raised in this conceptual paper.

A paper by *Henninger, Alevizou & Oates* focused on IMC, social media, is contextualized or analysed from the perspective of UK-based fashion micro-organisations. This paper represents a somewhat missing link as the exploration of IMC in SME's has been seriously neglected, despite an earlier claim by leading authors that SME's are closer to customers than their larger counterparts. In this paper an exploratory and longitudinal methodology is applied enabling immersion by the researchers in the company's [communication] processes, where other methods included interview, semiotics, Twitterfeed and Facebook . In this context, social media was described as:

'a great way to get in touch with your people who are interested in your brand – can share ideas, inspirations, styles, tips, and ideas.....'

As may be anticipated, these organisations tend to overcome resource constraints by being innovative and seeking access to every available free relevant digital platform, updating accounts on a regular basis (twice a day mentioned). However, and of interest here, receiver feedback did not seem to be incorporated into the communications strategy or tactics deployed by the micro company. The authors indicate that the company's communications seem to best accord with the first stage of Schultz & Kitchen (2010) IMC model, i.e. an inside-out, sales oriented approach to marketing communications. This is, of course, by no means limited to SME's (Editor). For these SME's, IMC is adopted in a somewhat partial and rather simplified manner, different channels are experimented with suggesting a lack of familiarity with customers and their media choices, and the focus tends to be short term in nature.

Given the paucity of studies of IMC in SME's, this could be a very fruitful field for subsequent research.

Measurement

This was one of the areas included in the call for papers. While several papers are focused to a minor degree upon this topic, only one tackles this subject wholeheartedly (i.e. Porcu et al). Many commentators seem to agree that the relationship between IMC and economic and financial performance is supported strongly, there is little empirical evidence to support this support. Porcu et al indicate that their firm-wide IMC scale (and related subscales) may offer at least a partial solution. However, there remain the need for apply the scale or their derivatives in specific company settings (before, during and following campaigns) either at the corporate, marketing or entire brand communication levels. In other words, the measurement issue, the holy grail of IMC and other forms of marketing communications, remains paramount insofar as future studies are concerned. Watch this space.

Concluding Comments

The juggernaut of marketing communication is changing shape, metamorphosing into new configurations and forms as a result of the underlying technological revolution and in the face of ongoing recessionary influences, including a loss of consumer confidence, The form best suited to accommodate these changes, at this time, appears to be integrated marketing communications or IMC and its corporate equivalent whether under the same title, or integrated corporate communications (ICC). I see few grounds as yet for the emergence of 'corporate marketing' as espoused by some in the 1990's and 2000's. Undoubtedly, the attractiveness of IMC has been noticed but not yet wholly purloined by its smaller budgeted corporate equivalent. In addition to business-to-consumer (B2C) and business to business (BTB) communication, the digital revolution means that for the first time in history, consumers and customers are exerting more influence, but not necessarily control over some marketing processes, including communication. Thus, consumer-to-consumer (C2C) communications is also becoming more important, and many corporations are now striving to insert themselves into the dialogue. Inevitable as it may seem, Inevitably and inexorably, see customers and consumers will play a far greater control in co-creating, disseminating, sharing, and evaluating marketing communications if the 'M' in IMC is to be realized fully.

Medias are moving in conjunction with their technological drivers. For example, in relation to cloud technological facilitators , 5 Exabytes of information were created between the dawn of civilization through 2003, but that much information is now created every 2 days." As Eric Schmidt (2010), the then CEO of Google pointed out "*The real*

issue is user-generated content,” noting that pictures, instant messages, and tweets all add to this. An exabyte is defined as ‘a unit of information equal to one quintillion (10¹⁸) bytes, or one billion gigabytes’. As the amount of data in the world explodes, the ability to manage all of this information has become increasingly difficult. In 2009, over \$4 trillion dollars was spent to manage close to 800,000 petabytes of data (1 PB = 1M GB) - by 2020, total data is expected to be 44 times that! And, 70% of all this data is media or media related. Admittedly, doubts have been cast on this data, but it has been repeated many times since then.

As pointed out in several papers, IMC itself must be marketing-driven or marketing-oriented. Effective IMC depends upon a data-driven approach coupled with information fecundity. Consumers, markets, audiences, stakeholders, constituencies and publics are different. The same techniques or models derived from a different era struggle in this new contextual setting. Hence, macro-style marketing or mass marketing is moving over in a similar manner to Neanderthals losing ground to the sharper, faster, and more intelligent homo sapiens. Micro marketing – the marketing to niche, segments or unitary markets seems the way forward (Kitchen & Proctor, 2016)

And as noted in the papers, the need for IMC related education is paramount. Not only brand and marketing managers need to learn or re-learn but their executive task masters must change or learn also. Marketers are changing and the pews of yesterday macro marketers are being filled by the new posteriors of Generation Y and Z characters, those who may understand the dynamics of today's markets (Ibid, 2016).

A few simple points may be made at the end:

Based on these papers, the term IMC is here to stay for the foreseeable future. Inexorably, ‘brand’, ‘consumer’ and ‘stakeholder’ are becoming inextricably intertwined with the concept.

Measurement remains the achilles heel for IMC, just as it was before for advertising. There are no simple, quick or easy answers relating what is spent or invested on communications relative to campaigns, annual sales or longer term brand branding to measurable returns. The answer would appear to lie in building and maintaining sophisticated data base systems or integrating all elements of the supply chain. Meanwhile, the call for short and long term returns relative to named campaigns or businesses is mandated. I suspect, however, the grappling claws of easy measurement will continue to grope around at the arcade game level of communications, but may not return very much in terms measurable return prizes.

Whatever else happens, a focus on inside-out IMC is not saying that much about anything. It is, when all is said and done, a short fix to bring about the one-voice phenomenon. It is, in fact, much more to do with selling and telling and less to do with marketing and real two-way communications.

Whatever else happens... companies should not lose touch with their markets whether they be online/offline or both.

And finally, it is great to see a new generation of IMC researchers starting to plumb the depths of IMC in exploring its foundation, examining its developing, exposing its applicability and extending the concept to new unthought of domains (some of these points were explored at an invited lecture, Tel Aviv, 2016).

Watch this space!

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